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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discern whether the mental picture a journal creates in its feature articles matches its mission statement. A content analysis was conducted on the feature articles in the seven most recent volumes of "Educational Leadership" (EL) and "Phi Delta Kappan" (PDK). Over 2,200 articles were analyzed for topics treated, format style, author affiliation, and presence of research findings. The results indicate that both journals adhere to their mission statements: close to 50% of the PDK articles were coded for "policy and law" and "subject matter and curriculum," and 64% of the EL articles were coded for "subject matter and curriculum" and "administration, management, and supervision." However, the articles in both journals were written in an informational format and few included research findings. More than 50% of the articles were written by university personnel who are only indirectly associated with the daily practices of the classroom. It appears that these journals fail to provide K-12 practitioners with a means to connect their practice with either theory or research. Nor is it likely that these journals enable K-12 practitioners to inform each other of their practice. Changes are needed that bring together the pedagogical scholar, academician, and educational researcher with the practitioner, making it possible for both journals to address the information needs of all readers. Data from the content analysis are presented in four tables. (7 references) (Author/GL)

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What do Journals of Education Tell Us About Education: Two Examples

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ABTSRACT

The purpose of this study was to discern whether the mental picture of a journal creates in its feature articles matches its mission statement. A content analysis was conducted on the feature articles in Educational Leadership (EL) and Phi Delta Kappan (PDK). Over 2200 articles were analyzed for topics treated, format style, author affiliation, and presence of research findings. The results indicate that both journals adhere to their mission statements: close to 50 percent of the PDK articles were coded for "policy and law" and "subject matter and curriculum" and 64 percent of the EL articles were coded for "subject matter and curriculum" and "administration, management and supervision." However, other topic areas do receive some attention. The articles in both journals are written in an informational format and few include research findings. More than 50 percent of the articles are written by university personnel. The linking of K-12 practitioners with educational researchers and academicians is considered.

What Do Journals of Education Tell Us About Education: Two Examples

Introduction

Education journals are one medium educators employ to communicate with colleagues. Some journals are specialized and represent the views of a select group of individuals; others are more general and subsequently reflect the concerns of a much larger segment of the educational community. A journal that is marketed as the "official voice" of an education organization serves two purposes: (1) a forum to discuss past and contemporary issues associated with American and international education, (2) a forum to identify those issues which may significantly influence education in the future. A major force influencing the selection of these ideas is the mission statement of the organization the journal represents. Given the number of journals marketed, it seems appropriate to identify the relationship between an organization's mission statement and its "official" journal. One approach is to match the mission statement appearing in a journal with the "mental picture" the journal creates in the feature articles it publishes in each issue and over an extended period of time.

The primary purpose of this study was to identify educational topics and related issues in two general education journals and to describe the "mental picture" each develops of education. To this end, a content analysis was performed on two general education journals. Feature articles in the journals

were analyzed for topics treated, format style, author affiliation, and presence of research findings.

The journals selected possess exceptionally large circulation rates and reach a large cross section of educators: Educational Leadership (EL) and Phi Delta Kappan (PDK) have circulations of 98000 and 145000, respectively. Each includes a mission statement that describes a major purpose of the organization the journal represents.[1] To insure a contemporary perspective of educational topics, the last seven volumes of EL and PDK were employed in the study. All of the feature articles in the table of contents in EL (N=1113) and in PDK (N=1096) were analyzed.

The following questions served to guide the analysis:

(1) What are the predominant educational topics treated in EL and PDK?

(2) What publishing practices do EL and PDK employ to facilitate the communication and exchange of ideas among educators?

(3) Do EL and PDK provide a means for educators to connect theory with practice?

Methodology

Prior content analyses of education journals provided suggestions for the investigation. Dillon's analysis of six curriculum journals suggested guidelines for identifying the format of journal articles. An analysis of higher education journals by Silverman identified methods of analyzing both

citations and article formats. Yarbrough's analysis of the Journal of Music Education listed both qualitative and quantitative components of articles that could be analyzed to detect research trends in music education. Denton, Tsai, and Cloud suggested a framework to analyze journal articles and presentations at professional conferences to measure productivity of various schools of education. Kroc offered a similar schema in the examination of citations of journal articles to identify the level of scholarly productivity of 51 schools of education. While each of these analyses differed in both method and intent, they all shared the overall purpose of detecting trends in the qualitative dimensions of articles accepted for publication in education journals.

Henson's list of educational journals was considered an appropriate pool from which to select the journals for review. The list included mostly journals that were identified as general (i.e., the inclusion of articles that treat a variety of issues related to American and international education). The following criteria were used to select the two journals: (1) reaches a large and highly diverse segment of the educational community; (2) includes a wide variety of educational topics; (3) enables educators at all school levels the opportunity to exchange practical and theoretical ideas.

Instrumentation. A coding instrument, a set of data management procedures, and a set of definitions were developed for the analysis. The instrument was used to gather data on each

article examined by coding the topic treated, author(s) affiliation, format, and presence of research findings. The data management procedures of the SPSSX systems were employed to organize the data (Noursis, 1986).

Topics. To refine the coding instrument and determine the efficacy of the data management procedures, dated issues of EL and PDK were examined. The following topic areas emerged and were deemed appropriate for categorizing the data: (1) policy and law, (2) subject matter and curriculum, (3) administration, management, and supervision, (4) teachers, teaching, and teacher education, (5) learners and learning, (6) multicultural and international education, (7) school and society, and (8) other (articles not coded in 1-7).

The following definitions for each topic area were developed and used to code articles during the analysis.

(1) Policy and Law. Effects of government decisions and actions on schools. The implications of government legislation for schools. Reports of policy decisions. Issues related to governmental actions such as compulsory education. Policy related to educational change and progress.

(2) Subject Matter and Curriculum. Issues pertaining to curriculum development and implementation at all school levels and for all subject areas.

(3) Administration, Management and Supervision. Issues and applications related to school administration and

bureaucracy; issues that address the practical and theoretical components of management (e.g., decision making, leadership, budget, management).

(4) Teachers, Teaching and Teacher Education. Issues relevant to teachers and teaching such as instructional materials, instructional strategies, lesson design, teacher behavior, philosophy of teaching, and teacher preparation.

(5) Learners and Learning. Effects of school on student achievement and motivation. Includes special groups such as the gifted and talented and the learning disabled. Learners in precollege, college, and the marketplace.

(6) Multicultural and International Education. Educational practices directed at minority and ethnic groups in the United States. Issues related to achievement, equality, and appropriateness of instruction for multicultural educational settings. Issues on education in overseas settings. The status of education in foreign countries.

(7) School and Society. Issues originating in the community which have an impact on schools and learning.

(8) Other. Issues not coded in 1-7.

Format. The analysis of dated issues for the study revealed three predominant format styles: conceptual, informational, and practical. The conceptual format includes the

presentation, explication, analysis, and criticism of ideas, issues, and theoretical positions. Authors writing in the conceptual format use argument, exhortation, opinion, essay, and theorizing to present ideas or positions. The informational format includes the communication of factual and normative information. Examples of the informational format are reports, reviews of literature, historical accounts, problems/solutions, and discussions or prescriptions of standards. The practical format includes pragmatic solutions and/or models for educational settings. Examples of the practical format are articles that focus on methods of teaching subject matter and designing curriculum. Although it was possible for an article to qualify for more than one format, for this analysis the rule was to identify the dominant style.

Research findings. The articles were also analyzed for the presence of research findings. The presence of research suggested that editorial boards attempt to inform readers of relevant research thereby encouraging the linking of research and practice. Articles describing surveys, questionnaires, observations, experimental methods, and quantitative or naturalistic investigations were most likely to contain research findings.

Author affiliation. Six categories were employed to code author(s) affiliation: (1) K-12, (2) college or university, (3) policy making, government, or department of education, (4) foundation, institute, research laboratory, or council, (5) free

lance, professional writer, consultant or business, (6) multiple authors (i.e., articles written by more than one author representing multiple institutions), and (7) author not identified.

Results

This investigation analyzed 2209 EL and PDK journal articles published from 1979 through 1987. The percent of the total articles categorized under each topic area are shown in Table 1. The results indicate that close to 50 percent of the PDK articles were coded "policy and law" and "subject matter and curriculum" and 64 percent of the EL articles were coded "subject matter and curriculum" and "administration, management, and supervision." The lowest percentage of articles in both journals pertain to "multicultural/international education" and to "school and society."

Insert Table 1 about here

A list of the topics and the specific issues associated with each area for both journals are shown in Table 2. While the list is not exhaustive, it is nevertheless representative of those issues found in each topic area. These issues seem to give a prima facie appearance of reflecting a cross sectional view of education. That is, a variety of topics are included across the eight topic areas from clinical supervision of teachers to child abuse and compensatory education. However, it is clear from

Table 1 that the journals do publish a greater percentage of articles pertaining to specific topics that more directly reflect the mission statement of the organization the journals represent.

Insert Table 2 about here

The percent of total articles identified by format style are shown in Figure 3. The dominant format style for both journals is informational. To a lesser degree, PDK favors articles that employ a conceptual format while EL favors articles identified as practical.

Insert Table 3 about here

The percent of articles employing research findings for both journals is low. Only 20 percent of PDK articles and 17 percent of EL articles included research findings. The data indicate that authors most likely to insert research findings are university professors; those least likely to are policy makers, government officials and employees of departments of education.

An analysis of author affiliation is shown in Table 4. Over half of the articles for both journals are contributed by university and college personnel. These authors include professors, doctoral students, and higher education administrators. Precollege personnel (i.e., teachers,

supervisors, curriculum specialists, principals, and superintendents) represented the second highest percentage of authors of articles for both journals.

Insert Table 4 about here

Discussion

Because PDK and EL have large circulation rates, they have the potential of being highly influential in communicating information to a diverse segment of the educational community. Hence, it is important to look closely at these journals to see the perspective of education they provide for their readers.

The content analysis revealed that while these two journals include articles that describe a variety of issues, they are nonetheless selective in the articles they publish. This selectivity appears to be on target with the journals' respective mission statements. PDK informs its readers primarily of topics that pertain to policy and law. As shown in Table 1, a greater percentage of articles related to this topic appear in PDK than do articles on other topics. According to the mental picture PDK portrays, education as a profession is deeply entrenched in federal and local legislation. Interestingly, however, only a small percentage of the articles are written by policy makers and government officials outside of education (see Table 4). Descriptions of societal issues are the exception rather than the rule. In addition, many of the articles published in PDK seem to

provide information rather than offer practical suggestions to its readers.

Similarly, EL appears to be on target with its mission of informing its readers of topics pertaining to supervision and curriculum. Almost 65 percent of the articles in EL pertain to these two topic areas. As a result, EL provides a somewhat different view of education than does PDK. Over 20 percent of the articles are authored by precollege educators who focus on such issues as subject matter and curriculum, school administration in K-12 settings, school management, and supervision of teachers. EL also appears to be a practitioner's guide to the classroom; approximately one-third of the articles adhere to the practical format. Similar to PDK, EL only occasionally includes articles pertaining to multicultural and international education and to social issues.

Both journals, then, while giving the semblance of being general and somewhat inclusive, tailor their selection of manuscripts to the mission statement of their respective parent organizations. Hence, it seems more appropriate to label these journals "specialized\general" rather than "general."

It is interesting to note that the major contributors to both journals are college level personnel (see Table 4). Yet the journals reach a wide segment of the educational community that includes the precollege practitioner. The absence of a greater number of articles written by precollege personnel raises interesting questions regarding the relationship between theory

and practice. If the journals' primary purpose is to provide a forum for an exchange of ideas among a wide cross section of the educational community, then the practitioners' contributions are an essential ingredient in the discussion. Moreover, practice-oriented reports could provide a fertile bed of theoretically interesting ideas for university level authors. Perhaps such a publishing practice would provide a means for some college personnel to be in closer contact with practitioners. In other words, not only would theory inform practice, but practice would inform theory. Secondly, the publication of articles primarily authored by college personnel also communicates a rather patronizing message to precollege practitioners: College personnel appear to be in better positions to inform practitioners of their own practice.

Finally, the journals cannot be described as forums for educational researchers to inform practitioners of their work. Twenty percent and 17 percent of the articles in PDK and EL, respectively, include research findings. Interestingly, PDK includes the phrase "educational research" in its mission statement. However, since these journals speak to more than a select group of educators and closely align themselves with their mission statements, it is inappropriate to argue that a significant number of articles accepted for publication be heavily laden with research findings. Yet the gap between researchers and practitioners persists. Perhaps journals like PDK and EL that have large circulation rates and reach a highly

diverse segment of the educational community could assume a greater share of the responsibility of providing one means of bridging the gap between researchers and practitioners, particularly in K-12 school settings.

Implications for Further Study

The findings from this investigation provide a portrayal of education as perceived by PDK and EL, two general education journals. The next step is to measure the influence of these two journals on the educational community. Such studies should focus more directly on the relationship between the journals and their readers. This relationship might be clarified by using the following questions as possible foci for future studies. How do readers specifically use these journals to inform their practice? In what ways do the journals enhance the professional perspective of educators who use them as sources of information? Do these journals help educators reflect on their own careers? What value do educators place on various portions of the journals? To what extent do the journals inform practice or theory? As studies provide answers to these questions, perhaps the informational needs of educators, particularly at the K-12 setting, can be more directly and appropriately met.

Summary

A content analysis was conducted of the feature articles published from 1979 to 1987 in Educational Leadership and Phi Delta Kappan to identify the contemporary educational topics and related issues treated in these journals. Over 2200 articles

were analyzed. For both journals, a large percentage of the articles adhered to an informational format while a low percentage contained research findings. It appears that while these journals reach a great number of educators, they likely fail to provide K-12 practitioners with a means to connect their practice with either theory or research. Nor is it likely that these journals enable K-12 practitioners to inform each other of their practice. Indeed, a large percentage of the articles are authored by those who are only indirectly associated with the daily practices of the classroom.

The "mental pictures" these journals create reflect the mission statements of the organizations they represent. Nevertheless, because of their expansive readership and potential to disseminate information to many educators, including practitioners, both journals have a responsibility to provide all of their readers with useful information. To meet this responsibility, changes are needed that bring together the pedagogical scholar, academician, and educational researcher with the practitioner. The integration of theory and practice is part of the mission of PDK and EL.

Endnote

1. Educational Leadership is intended primarily for the leaders in elementary, middle and secondary education but is also for anyone interested in curriculum, instruction, supervision and leadership in schools. The Phi Delta Kappan publishes articles concerned with educational research, service, and leadership; issues and trends and emphasized.

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Table 1

Topic areas by percent of feature articles in Educational Leadership and Phi Delta Kappan from 1979 through 1987

Topic Area	Journal	
	PDK	EL
policy/law	26.5	6
subject matter/curriculum	21	40
administration/management/supervision	11	24
teachers/teaching/teacher education	16.5	12
learners/learning	9.5	6
multicultural/international education	6	4.5
school and society	2.5	1.5
other	6.5	6

Table 2

Topic areas and related educational issues in EL and PDK from 1979 through 1987

Topic area	Educational issues
Policy and Law	High school reform; Middle school reform; School excellence; Compensatory education; Title 1; Proposition 2 1/2 in Massachusetts; Compensatory education; Privatization of schools; Coleman Report; Holmes Group; Carnegie Task Force
Subject Matter Curriculum	Reading education; English education; Science; Art; Language; Computer education; Environmental education; Home schooling; Instructional design; Textbook evaluation; School-community partnerships; School-business partnerships; Parental involvement; Ability grouping
Administration Supervision Management	Principalship; School effectiveness; School change; Leadership theory; Leadership training; Shared leadership; Leadership development; Clinical supervision; Teacher performance assessment; Transactional evaluation; Staff development
Teachers Teacher Education	NCATE; Preservice teacher education; Teacher training; Merit Pay; Master teachers; Reflective teaching; Effective teaching; Measurement driven instruction; Teacher stress and burnout; Measurement driven instruction; National teacher exam
Learers Learning	Specical students; Disadvantaged learners; Handicapped learners; Gifted learners; Talented learners; Electronic learning; Hemispheric learning
Multicultural International	International education; Bilingual education; Discrimination; Minority learners; Education in Japan, Soviet Union and China.

Table 2 Continued

School and Society	Nuclear Issues; Teen pregnancy; Drugs in Schools; One parent familes; Divorced families; Social welfare programs; Child abuse; Urban problems
Other	Writing for publication; Women in Education; Day care schools; Software development; Scientific creationism

Table 3

Percentage of articles by format style in Educational Leadership and Phi Delta Kappan from 1979 through 1987

Journal	Format Style		
	Conceptual	Informational	Practical
Educational Leadership	10	57.7	32.3
Phi Delta Kappan	18.4	71	10.6

Table 4

Percentage of articles by author affiliation in Educational Leadership and Phi Delta Kappan from 1979 through 1987

Institution	Journal	
	PDK	EL
university	57	55
precollege	14	21.5
free lance, consultant, business	13	11.5
foundations, institutues, research	9	5.5
policy making, government, departments of education	6	6
affiliation unidentified	1	0.5